

A Pilgrim God with a Pilgrim People

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Abstract: *The article further explores the image of God of the Journey in terms of Griffiths' more mature theology of complementarity (rather than fulfilment). Griffiths' understanding of the Christian faith as a unique manifestation of 'the seeds of the Word' is deepened through his encounter with Indian religions. However, as a Benedictine monk and Sannyasi, his practice of radical hospitality means that his encounter with other religions also convinces him of the distinctive importance of other faiths. Other faith journeys are also unique. How can this image best be analysed in order to better understand a 'Pilgrim God'?*

Key Words: Bede Griffiths; Christian-Hindu dialogue; life as journey; believer as pilgrim; Christian mysticism; Hindu mysticism; *Vedas*; complementarity

In the last eJournal my article, "Dom Bede Griffiths and God of the Journey" detailing a personal walk in Bede Griffiths' footsteps, introduced an image of central importance in his life following 'the Golden String.' God of the Journey presented him with the challenge of radical hospitality. In both English and Scottish Benedictine monasteries where he lived prior to the move to India, the virtue of hospitality as enunciated in The Rule¹ proved a satisfying spur in his monastic roles.² With the enormous geographic and cultural change that the move to India represented in his life, came a focus on Hindu Advaita³ and exploration of a Christian expression for this experience. This sustained encounter evoked a radical personal response in his assuming the identity of Sannyasi, further inspired his contemplative experience and prompted conceptual change. Most likely it was Griffiths' very adherence to this central tenet of Benedictine spirituality, hospitality earthed in humility, that provided a stable base for his deepening theological understanding of 'journey,' as one which encompasses all of humanity as a pilgrim people with its pilgrim God.

In his 1993 PhD thesis, *Bede Griffiths' Theory of religious symbol and practice of dialogue: Towards interreligious understanding*, Judson B. Trapnell⁴ tracked Griffiths' journey of encounter with Eastern religious traditions that took him from a theology of fulfilment to one of complementarity. Griffiths is not alone in this conviction that the world's religions while expressive of diverse histories and cultures, evocative of different myths, grown out of contrasting symbols, nevertheless point to the one divine mystery.

¹ *The Rule of St Benedict* written one and a half centuries ago includes 'this happy state' of humility, and hospitality whereby each stranger 'should be received just as...Christ himself' as traits recommended for practice for our earthly pilgrimage that are perfectly exemplified in the Divine Pilgrim.

² At Prinknash, Griffiths was Guest-master; at Pluscarden, Scotland, he was Novice-master.

³ The Sanskrit term, meaning 'not two,' for the concept dealing with the non-dualistic apprehension of reality.

⁴ Sadly, Dr Judson Trapnell, friend of Dom Bede Griffiths, died of cancer in August, 1993.

Our pilgrimage round the world reflected what Michael Barnes SJ has described as Ricoeur's sense of 'synchronic subjectivity' (in contrast to Levinas' 'diachronic call of the other') that also encompasses the more primordial responsibility of the self before history and culture.⁵ Although a sweet resonance joined the different Christian monastic communities we visited like the familiar echo of a bell, in light of Griffiths own 'journey,' the full depth of the human experience owns a universal religious significance.

Clearly the journey theme is multi-valent. It includes the interior spiritual journey, the evolution of consciousness and all other related journeys, historical to cosmic. 'The Perennial Philosophy' which Griffiths finds cohesive with his experience has foundational importance.⁶ It describes a metaphysics, in some instances rudimentary, elaborately developed in world religions, that the deepest essential self, discoverable through an inward ascetical journey, reveals the divine as the ground of being.⁷ Griffiths proclaims the divine 'other,' as One who imbues all of creation; he shares with all mystics the knowledge that the 'One Supreme God' is beyond conceptualization. Earlier, in 1958, Rudolf Otto wrote of the "'self-attestation' of religious ideas in one's own mind," as distinct from historical tradition and primeval revelation.⁸ In the 80's in dialogue with the new science, Griffiths interprets the significance for theology of the belief that the entire cosmos is a dynamic web of interdependent relationships, in terms of the evolution of human consciousness and the mutual relationships between God, humanity and all of creation. But it is through our very humanity and via our finite senses that the God beyond names is mediated through creation and present to human beings. As evidence of growth, a uniquely human spiritual dimension recognizes itself and seeks expression in symbol which gives meaning to life with its vicissitudes.⁹

Mircea Eliade insists, 'the symbol the myth and the image are of the very substance of the spiritual life, they may become disguised, mutilated or degraded, but never extirpated.'¹⁰ Through their different symbols, Christian, Jewish and Muslim mystics convey an experiential knowledge of God which like Hinduism speaks of a movement or journey out from the divine or transcendent source and a return. Griffiths found confirmation and support in the writings of Ruusbroec and Eckhart. Eckhart advises, 'To get at the core of God one must first get into the core of himself...for no one can know God who has not first known himself. Go to the depths of the soul, the secret place of the Most High, to the roots, to the heights; for all that God can do is focused there.'¹¹ In particular Griffiths discerns clear correlations between the Vedic seers' disclosure of the wholly immanent in all creation, and Christian mystical insight and Trinitarian theology which we can recognize in these words of Eckhart, 'When creatures came to be and took

⁵ Michael Barnes SJ, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 119.

⁶ Leibnitz was responsible for this term which was further elaborated by Aldous Huxley.

⁷ <http://members.tripod.com/~parvati/perennial.html>; <http://www.perennial.org/>

⁸ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. Trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 130.

⁹ Judson Trapnell, "Bede Griffiths' Theory of Religious Symbol and Practice of Dialogue: Towards Interreligious Understanding" (PhD dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., 1993). Both for Griffiths and the Buddhist Lama Govinda, religious symbols are formed in the sub-conscious as a result of non-rational experience and express what is true via images which can be rationally interpreted, 391. They are 'the expression of the divine mystery in the depths of human consciousness.' 323.

¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols, Studies in Religious Symbolism* (Mission, KS: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1961), Forward 11.

¹¹ Raymond Blackney, *Eckhart, A Modern Translation* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1941), 246.

on creaturely being, then God was no longer God as he is in himself, but god as he is with creatures.¹²

Self-surrender can be seen to be constitutive of divinity.¹³ Christian theology expresses this as love in relationship, epitomized or, more significantly, incarnated in the Christian absolute symbol,¹⁴ Jesus Christ. In *River of Compassion*,¹⁵ Griffiths explains the difference between the Gita and the Advaita Vedanta¹⁶ interpretation such as that of Shankara - because it only appears that Brahman acts, a person must go beyond karma, beyond action to reach God. In the Gita - though eternally inactive, God always acts. As the action in the world derives from One who is immutable, it is intuited and theologically interpreted as sacrifice and clearly this is significant for Christians.

The *Vedic* myth of origins, more ancient than the *Bhagavad Gita*, is quite esoteric. It is 'not an attempt to communicate information but to share mystical awareness'; the primordial mystery is 'wrapped' in the total darkness of apophatism.¹⁷ Here, we need to assume a non-analytical, receptive attitude. In the following brief exposition of the myth of journey out and return I've used Panikkar's *The Vedic Experience Mantramanjari* because of the clarity which is due to his aim of avoiding any correlations with other religions or the sciences (although he says the temptation was sometimes very strong). It comes to us from the *risis*, the contemplative 'forest dwellers,' via the final stage of the Vedic process, the *Upanishads*.¹⁸

The wholly transcendent 'origin' for want of a better word is neither 'being' nor 'non-being' but again for want of a better word 'thisness' (or thatness) *idam* or (*tad*). 'This' is 'that' but also '*tad ekam*' - absolute oneness. Ardor in 'thisness' *tamar*, desires *kama* 'to be.' Being results and 'being' - *prajapati* - longs to create 'other.' (We are speaking here of primordial symbols - the fruit of contemplative experience and insight). How can 'being' bring about 'being'? *Prajapati* self-sacrifices - self-dismembers and self-immolates through the power/fire *agni*, of ardour/*tamar* and desire/*kama* which is also order. From this dismemberment and immolation is created all that is in existence. But *Prajapati* is now exhausted and weakened, and material existence goes its own way, independent and prone to disorder and chaos. *Prajapati* longs to rescue and reunite with material existence. In this instance, the son - the primordial man - *purusa*, is the means - through the power of the emanation of the energy of ardour - which is feminine gender. Consciousness seeks its source and the *Atman* - the deep self-reflective consciousness - is revealed as one with the wholly transcendent other, *Brahman*. It is precisely here the soul may attain to *saccitananda*, being, consciousness, bliss.

¹² Ibid, 228.

¹³ Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West: A Sequel to the Golden String*. 2nd ed. (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1983), 97.

¹⁴ For an explication of symbol, real symbol, absolute symbol, relative absolute symbol, see Trapnell, 320-330.

¹⁵ In *River of Compassion* published in 1987 (directly the result of talks given to the members of the Shantivanam ashram), Griffiths provides a Christian commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, intended not as an academic work but 'a practical guide...to anyone who is in search of a guide on the spiritual path.' As such, it deals with some concepts more familiar to the lay person, such as, *kundalini yoga*, re-incarnation, devotional love - *bhakti*, non-dualism - *advaita*, and work/activity.

¹⁶ *Advaita* is one of the schools of *Vedanta*, one of the six orthodox *darshans* of Indian philosophy.

¹⁷ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience Mantramanjari: An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration* (Delhi: Shri Jainendra Press, 1983), 55.

¹⁸ Reading this summary account of the Vedic myth of origins, it is best to remember Panikkar's caution, 'The Vedic experience...does not carry a doctrinal message, but a universal form of human celebration.' *The Vedic Experience*, 27. Griffiths' *River of Compassion* also deals with this subject. However, here, Griffiths does make connections and correlations with the Christian faith.

Later, *Bhakti Yoga*, a way of devotion, one of four ways defined by the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, would say that the final goal in the divine transcendence is not a loss of identity through dissolution in the One but rather an experience of unity with all that is. This unity is made possible by the sacrifice or 'gift' of self, reflective of the self-sacrifice of *Prajapati*. This sacrifice is to be interpreted as conversion, the engagement of the whole person from the very core or inmost temple. The myth expresses a movement both personal and universal towards wholeness and integration, which is completed by union with the divine in contemplation and extended in a life of prayer.¹⁹

Griffiths was aware of the theological treatise of the cosmic dimension in Teilhard de Chardin's *Le Milieu Divin* and *Prayer of the Universe*. He also found Capra's *The Tao of Physics* describing the discovery of a unifying principle behind apparent chaos as significant. It correlates with the theological observation that the human capacity to juggle, balance and order diverse ideas and practices and achieve wholeness and integration is based on relationship with a transcendent Unity. Ken Wilber, philosopher and transpersonal psychologist, provided further support. Griffiths was conversant with his writings. In '*Up from Eden a transpersonal View of Human Evolution*,' Wilber shows how each new stage of consciousness which humankind achieves is a recapitulation of earlier stages. Moreover, the process of the evolution of consciousness for humanity as a whole replicates that of the individual person. The same kind of process takes place in human development as demonstrated by the behavioural psychologist, Piaget.²⁰

Holding fast to 'The Golden String,' Griffiths could not help but consider such questions. He was motivated to inquire about and seek answers with regard to 'the feminine' in God and in the human intellectual make-up, and Hinduism as a religion with a vast panorama of male and female 'gods' appealed to him. Images, the stuff of symbol, are a vehicle of expression and communication that can engage different levels of a human being helping towards unity while simultaneously assuring unique distinction. Griffiths' investigation of the *Vedas* and the *Bhagavad Gita* from the *Mahabharata* became for him a confirmation of the truth of the Christian Gospels while at the same time providing a much deeper insight into the One who paradoxically journeys with us, of the incredible texture, variety, the sheer adventure of the journey out from and back to the divine mystery the ground of our being and source of life. From this perspective, a human being is earth, air and water, part of the journey of the cosmos – a human being is star-dust – but star-dust in which the energy of the entire cosmos achieves its greatest poise. Trapnell believes that Griffiths, through his search for a marriage of East and West, and feminine and masculine tendencies, had himself towards the end of his life, finally achieved this poise of personal integration and self-transcendence.

In *The Marriage of East and West*, published in 1982, Griffiths draws attention to the present stage of the journey of humankind as one of crisis – by corollary for the whole Earth. Trapnell argues that Griffiths as one who has transcended in his own person the divisive issues of East and West is a 'culture-bearer.' As a 'bridge,' he holds the solution to be a recognition at the level of mystical intuition of the common goal for all creation. The

¹⁹ Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 51-57.

²⁰ It counters and balances the radical Hindu concept of re-incarnation, with the necessary release from *Samsara* through *moksha* or enlightenment, a cyclic process compared with the Judaic/Christian linear eschatological view. Jesus' words concerning John the Baptist as the Elijah who was to come (Mt 11:14) might lead to a more open-minded interpretation of re-incarnation in some acceptable form or degree; Griffiths believes that possibly elements of the psyche which have not developed could return to consciousness in some kind of re-incarnation. At any rate, perhaps an image for the journey in and to God which is a combination of cyclic and linear would be relevant here, such as - a multiple helix.

predicament is represented, through a dialogue with the Indian religious tradition, as a lack in each. The consequences are far-reaching. From its formation in the West, Christian faith presents a path by way of repentance for sin, and a new righteous way of living in Christian community in and through Jesus Christ whose identification as the Incarnate Word of God gives value to all of history and to all material existence. This 'value' has eschatological significance in regard to 'the Kingdom of Heaven' both a present and final future reality. Indian religious tradition recognizes an interior ascetical movement co-relative with an insight into the illusory quality of material existence, which is the path to experience of the wholly transcendent One. The goal of the interior journey is the experience of unity whereby the Self, the Atman is realized as Brahman, the One without a second. The whole of material existence while ultimately left behind through entry into a wholly transcendent reality, is nevertheless sacred, the perishable 'body' of God which mediates the divine reality. The 'shadow-sides' represent for the West a focus on 'exterior' phenomena, and in the wake of the Enlightenment an objectification of knowledge and the material world with disastrous consequences for the environment and other cultures. In the East, specifically India, it represents a disregard for material concerns and fatalistic acceptance of human suffering as part of *samsara*. In both East and West, there is a tendency, with regard to religious and secular life, to dis-integration.

Speaking in terms of interreligious dialogue - what could happen with such a 'marriage'? Would the world stand the world on its head? What if 'the West' were to discover²¹ within, a unity with the deepest self (as Self) and all of creation? What if 'the East' were to realize an ultimate value in all features of this present material existence? There would be real ethical consequences in both 'worlds.' The Pilgrim God who journeys with us would be manifest in new perhaps startling ways. Alan Griffiths was certainly startled at times by the surprising turn of events that took place in his own life as he journeyed with God. His outer journeyings, which increased much to his surprise in the last two years of his life, and his interior way seemed to crystallise.²²

The task now is to apply some kind of analysis to this crystallisation of ideas, in particular to the images he used to express the theological conclusions he had reached towards the end of his own journey. It is possible that such images, if taken up and used in the spirit intended, could in some way answer present needs.

The thesis is moving in the area of dialogical encounter through the examination of Griffiths' images for God born out of his search for a Christian Vedanta in the daily Ashramic experience. Most would agree with Barnes that in a dialogical encounter, conversation precedes cognitive analysis. He reports that for Derrida, 'speaking comes before writing.' For Raimon Panikkar, 'the dialogue of persons precedes and makes possible the dialectic of ideas.'²³ Griffiths' life-time journey (and even my own recent short pilgrimage) demonstrated an openness to be engaged in such a conversation.

In describing the value of Lonergan's method, Anthony Kelly CSSR points out the essential value of scholars 'to take notice of the workings of their own minds, and to attend to the "intentionality" - the conscious experience - of their coming to know anything at all.'²⁴ Knowing is here understood to include the workings of sense, imagination and

²¹ 'Re-discover' would be appropriate here in terms of the Christian mystical tradition.

²² As he lay dying at Shantivanam, Dom Bede recognized a face from Prinknash in England and was visibly joyful as he said, 'That completes the circle.'

²³ Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 137.

²⁴ Anthony Kelly, CSSR. *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God* (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989), 42.

feeling. Griffiths' use of images which bridge immediate experience and the 'real symbol' is the present focus. In Biblical times, Jesus' words, 'I am the good shepherd,' served such a function. Today, however, for this image to have immediacy such that it can provide such a bridge, any person who does not hail from a society and culture comparable to that of Jesus' day, must be first educated as to the particular meaning of 'shepherd' in context.

Griffiths has interpreted William Blake's image of 'the golden string,' as the guiding presence of Christ in reference to Christian faith.

I give you the end of a golden string
Only wind it into a ball
And it will take you in at Heaven's gate
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

For Griffiths, Christ, 'the golden string,' is most fully present in the Sacraments to the Christian person who is 'on the way.' The gate is faith, but once inside 'the heavenly city' all this is left behind; dogma, rules and sacraments are no longer necessary in the direct experience of God. What are the implications for people of other faiths. One can attempt to apply the principle of rhetoric to the image of journey in view of Griffiths' mature theology of complementarity.

'Journey' in this respect becomes an image of depth and density. It includes Aquinas' idea of 'connaturality.' In his exploration of the Hindu concept of *Advaita* and the interior journey to the Self, the *Atman*, Griffiths describes the human spirit, 'the fine point of the soul,' comparable to the *Buddha*. It is at this point that the Spirit of God and the human spirit meet, where the human spirit is open to realization of the divine ground of being, the Self. He understands 'connaturality' as describing that principle common to all humanity as a primordial intuition of this innate taste for the divine. With regard to interreligious dialogue 'journey' includes various journeys, different paths to the one reality. Whereas the Reality is One, the real symbols that mediate this presence to souls on the way vary. For each path/religion they are absolute, although, to the extent that the symbol must be transcended for entry into union with the wholly transcendent reality, they are relative. Griffiths thus can describe Jesus Christ in regard to other religions as a 'relative absolute symbol.'²⁵ One remembers that there are a number of 'gates' in 'The Heavenly City.' (Caution must be taken here. Griffiths constantly insists that in contrast to pure *Advaita*, Christian mystical experience speaks ultimately of unity in multiplicity. God is One but holding all within that oneness. The experience is one, total union yet distinction. Griffiths points to the Buddhist experience described by Lama Govinda for comparison. Rather than the image from pure *Advaita* of the drop dissolving in ocean, Lama Govinda speaks of the ocean 'slipping into' the drop).²⁶

Furthermore, the soul is characterized, moulded and formed, through the demarcation of history and culture within the mediatory influence of the Real Symbol. As a consequence, although the ultimate reality is the One, the experience is uniquely different. The uniqueness of the Christian faith for Griffiths resides in the fact that Jesus is the Word incarnated in history,²⁷ Christ, the Son who lived in obedience to the Father's will and was raised to eternal life. He is neither *avatar*, nor legend. Although Christians must 'go beyond' all signs and symbols to experience God, finally, union with this Christ persists

²⁵ For detailed explanation of Real Symbol/Absolute Symbol especially in respect to Griffiths, see Trapnell, "Bede Griffiths' Theory of Religious Symbol and Practice of Dialogue," 320-400.

²⁶ Trapnell, "Bede Griffiths' Theory of Religious Symbol and Practice of Dialogue," 394.

²⁷ '.... incarnation in some sense is a universal phenomenon...(which) exists in some form in Hinduism...Buddhism...Islam,' *The Tablet* 1971, 'Man and God in India,' 5,6. Griffiths citing Geoffrey Parrinder.

into/within the final state of perfection. The experience, understood as all held in the ultimate simplicity of the One, is also one of Love, the ultimate 'communion.' The Christian mystical experience speaks of God who is Love; Love in relationship.

At this point, one must be reminded of Griffiths' continual insistence that we be aware of the limitation of language when seeking to communicate 'knowledge' of the ineffable. The image of a 'journeying God' among a 'journeying people' is helpful here. As Kelly points out, while 'God is incomprehensible...the language of theology is analogical.'²⁸

Barnes describes the four types of inter-faith dialogue – the dialogue of life, the dialogue of common action, the dialogue of religious experience and the dialogue of theological exchange, that all represent different dimensions of a familiar human experience, the everyday encounter with another person which opens up new vistas and new possibilities.²⁹ Theological dialogue takes into consideration lived life, spirituality and religious practice of all kinds and the intimate links between.³⁰ The problem lies in finding the right balance and in using language which communicates to people in present times. Why is this necessary? For one thing, wrong interpretations can be harmful.

Wainwright describes the heartbreak when great stories or grand narratives are '...used in a way that is death-dealing – a key characteristic, even if not made explicit, in our present great global conflict.'³¹

For the Romantics, with whom Griffiths empathised so closely prior to his conversion, apprehension of beauty gives rise to pure thought and freedom of spirit. As he discovered, this is part of the picture only. We have to contend with 'the broken middle,' the 'place' between 'same' and 'other' available for negotiation.³² There is the ethical dimension to consider. The needs of 'others' should be a primary concern while at the same time accepting that such a response, though a means of transcendence, does not deny the need for a strong sense of self. '... even – perhaps especially – the most self-effacing of persons requires a strong sense of self.'³³ Significantly, Barnes maintains,

The work of communication across the 'broken middle, which demands such a complex interaction of theological 'dimensions,' is due not so much to the inadequacy or incompleteness of the language of cultural idioms which are used, but the fact that, in a much more profound sense, the persons who seek to communicate are themselves incomplete.³⁴

It brings to mind also Thomas Aquinas' now famous insight gained through contemplation, 'All I have written is straw, the cross is everything' that confesses the intractable nature of Christian life - encompassing all of human life – its origin-insertion-completion in the Paschal mystery and the profound height, depth and breadth promised and available there for all. As with Aquinas, for the person 'in the field' immediate experience of the simple truth of the 'other' can make the carefully constructed house of cards seem to collapse through a kind of death experience which is nevertheless transformative.

It suggests the need for respect and support for people who choose to serve those who might be considered 'different' if not 'other' in a professional capacity be it education,

²⁸ Kelly, *Trinity of Love*, 252.

²⁹ Ibid, 243.

³⁰ Ibid, 244.

³¹ E. Wainwright, cited in D. Casey, G. Hall, and A. Hunt (eds.), *Foundations of Christian Faith* (Southbank, Vic: Social Science Press, 2004), 232.

³² Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 246.

³³ Ibid, 64.

³⁴ Ibid, 246.

medicine or various pastoral ministries where encounter and interaction can be a challenge, even shock, of a particular kind that draws on levels of intellectual, academic, psychological, and spiritual maturity. On the other hand it is a reminder that all faith-filled persons are stretching beyond themselves towards the Other which also demands respect and sensitivity. It is human nature to be self-defensive. At a time when Catholic lay people are required to step beyond 'comfort zones,' what of their fears? To recognise and ease the fears of others, to help others overcome their fears, one must first have recognised and to some extent overcome fears of one's own. In *The Contemplative Life in India*,³⁵ it is clear Griffiths understands charity exercised in faith is a means to self-transcendence. Griffiths' journey involved the need to understand the interplay of prayer and activity. This became more significant later in his life as he explored different ways of achieving Christian contemplative community that would best serve present times.

We are dealing specifically with 'other' in terms of religious persuasion in the understanding that this takes in the whole of lived life. While Barnes is concerned with describing an attitude for 'negotiating the space between' where 'same' and 'other' meet, following the thought of Levinas, Bob Plant warns of an indiscriminate application of 'radical otherness' and agrees with Bernstein who 'condemns ...the facile "postmodern" temptation to lump together all differences under the general rubric of *the "other."*'³⁶

For example, Griffiths' journey with the Golden String involves a personal intuition that what is perceived as 'other' will be discovered to be not radically so. This is alternately suggested by reference to the 'perennial philosophy' and to his confidence in the demonstration of the New Science of the workings of the cosmos as 'a dynamic web of interdependent relationships.' According to Wayne Teasdale this led him to be always searching for 'the common ground, the bridge that unites all ways of knowing in an overarching unified knowledge, a kind of new species of wisdom.'³⁷ Teasdale concludes, for example, that while Griffiths does not identify *saccidananda* with the Trinity, nevertheless his 'recognition' of a common Cosmic (Covenantal) Revelation and 'point of encounter in the depths of interior experience'³⁸ allows, for the sake of creative dialogue with Hindus, the adoption of *Saccidananda*, being, consciousness, bliss as a Sanskrit 'equivalent' for the Trinity. This makes possible a 'Christian Vedanta' – a Christian teaching in Hindu terms for creative correspondence with Hindus – which is a way of 'allowing others to speak without their voices being presented within the language appropriate for describing one culturally specific experience.'³⁹

The question Barnes deals with is the identification of the cutting edge, or the growth point of faith itself. Risking compromising the integrity and life of 'same' in contradistinction to 'other' through a dialogical encounter demands movement across boundaries and 'becoming other' – a more radical encounter than 'standing in someone else's shoes' or 'seeing from a different vantage point,' it means change is inevitable. 'Alterity' then is the real 'other' which nudges the arousal of alarm. However, analysing the presence of the past as the anarchic returning 'other,' following Ricoeur, Barnes

³⁵ Pax, 51, 1961, 105-111.

³⁶ Bob Plant, *Wittgenstein and Levinas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

³⁷ Wayne Teasdale, *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2003), 199.

³⁸ Ibid, 181.

³⁹ Ibid, 115.

identifies this phenomenon as integral to Christian faith and concludes that this is the cutting edge, the point of growth.⁴⁰

Jesus warns against a lukewarm faith involvement giving the example of salt which having lost its taste can no longer enhance the flavour of food and is therefore useless and to be thrown out. If the cutting edge, the point of growth, the place where things are alive and happening is indeed where the risk of alterity exists, where that which is different even 'other' is encountered and engaged in dialogue in a spirit of courage, then for people of faith this is no mere option but vital for the sake of integrity. Following this argument suggests that a faith which does not discomfort is a spurious faith.

This connects with Levinas' emphasis on the ethical dimension. Plant, however, argues against Levinas' 'pessimistic' stance on the 'natural' as groundless. He compares it with Wittgenstein's later thought (contradicting his earlier held premise) supporting a positive interpretation of 'natural, primitive phenomena.'⁴¹

Plant points to Wittgenstein's argument that language 'is 'auxiliary to,' an 'extension,' 'refinement' or 'replacement' of primitive reactions.'⁴² The 'pre-linguistic, natural or 'primitive' reactions towards other' are grounded upon the fact of suffering 'central to the life of human beings' which draws forth a natural response of care and concern.⁴³ Wittgenstein would argue on the grounds of an underlying 'unifying naturalism' against the definition of 'radically other' though this is not to explain away distinction or difference due to historical events and cultural diversity or to suggest any easy way of overcoming resultant tensions and separation. There is a correlation between Wittgenstein's idea of primitive and contemporary (all) religious rituals deriving from the same 'general inclination' and Griffiths' intuition of a commonality of mystical experience. Barnes agrees that 'same' and 'other' are *relational* categories, not the poles of a dualism.⁴⁴ God's self-revelation in the process of history is compatible with the evolution of human consciousness in a kind of 'birthing' that is consonant with Paul's insight in Romans 8:22 of the entire cosmos in labour to give birth.

In what Trapnell describes as Griffiths' second stage of self-transcendence (which took place in India), Christian faith was seen by him as supreme, the fulfilment of God's self-revelation. Trapnell recognizes in a third stage of transcendence, a personal integration which led Griffiths to proclaim the 'hidden' God who journeys, in a poignantly intimate way, with all of humanity in separate, unique ways. Now, for Griffiths Christian faith is unique but no longer regarded as 'supreme.' It highlights in a new way, the coming to be of the transcendent One in Judaic history as 'Yahweh' or 'Elohim' who exercises 'sovereign freedom.'⁴⁵ Humankind may learn to bow her head in awe at the divine, spontaneous, profligate sowing of the 'logoi spermatikoi.'⁴⁶ Christians may also be aided to recognise and celebrate a permanent familial relationship with Judaism. The journeying God who 'walks with' us is the longed for Homeland of all humankind and the entire

⁴⁰ Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 100.

⁴¹ Plant, *Wittgenstein and Levinas*, 9.

⁴² Ibid, 87.

⁴³ Ibid, 89.

⁴⁴ Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 117.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 85.

⁴⁶ *Seeds of the Word* – an image used by Justin Martyr in respect to Greco-Roman culture (see Cullan Joyce, *The Seeds of Dialogue in Justin Martyr*, AEJT 7) and persisting to Vatican II when it was used in respect to knowledge of truth found in all peoples.

cosmos; it is an image which demands patience and humility; an acknowledgment that our grasp of truth is only ever partial.

Use of a sophisticated tool, that is, the application of the principles of rhetoric, to the image presented here of God of the Journey, the Pilgrim God who journeys with a pilgrim people, will as I have suggested be most helpful. Investigating this image further through analysing it in terms of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony will help to pinpoint any negative issues and hopefully demonstrate its integrity, strength and richness for harnessing in the different levels of interreligious dialogue. For this, the present article has presented an introduction to what will have to be the subject of another.

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